

THE
COFFEE HOUSE.

A CHARACTERISTIC POEM.

“The proper study of mankind is Man.”

POPE.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE Truth of the Analogy between Poetry and Painting has been frequently observed, and acknowledged. A Critic, endued with Sensibility, withholds not some Degree of Praise from the Picture or Poem, in which Human Manners are justly delineated, though he finds not in either the Genius of Shakspere, or Hogarth. To the "fine Phrenzy" of the Poet the Writer of the following Lines makes no Pretensions : he has confined his attempt to a faithful Transcript of Manners. To Invention, the Soul of Poetry, the Author is content to rest his sole Claim on the sincere Declaration, that no

one Part of the Poem is *personal*. Whilst the Man of Taste can view with Complacency the characteristic Sketches of Bunbury and Rawlandson; the Author of the following Essay may not be destitute of Hope, that the Critic will not be disgusted, though he can discern in it neither the luxuriant Humour of PETER PINDAR, nor the dignified Satire of COWPER.

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“The proper study of mankind is Man.”

POPE.

THE Dial points to seven—and now the roar
Of hungry wights importunate; the quick steps
Of bustling waiters, and their sharp replies
Of “Coming, Sir!” the crash of empty plates;
No more torment the ear—each fated guest,
By bus’ness or by pleasure call’d away,

B

Leaves the dark room to silence and to me:
Now busy Fancy to my eye recalls
Each late departed visitor: the sound
Of various talk still tingles in my ear;
Whilst Memory describes with faithful hand
Each look, each gesture, which some minutes since
Feasted my keen attention with delight.

There sat a party from the rest aloof,
With elbows on the table, and their necks
Crane-like extended, with their mouths wide open
To catch each weighty syllable, that fell
From yon grave Orator; whose ceaseless voice
Colloquial magnetism has infus'd
O'er their expiring faculties: his hands,
Which move with uniform and steady sway,
With accents slow and solemn well accord.
At the commencement of this long harangue,

Some of the boldest of his audience call'd
For proofs and documents and vouchers, that
Might back his strong assertions, or coerce
With doubts and queries, or with keen retorts,
This dread invasion on the Rights of Tongues.
But he, a second Mesmer, has intranc'd,
By oft repeated motions of his hands
And lips unwearied, each objector's speech—
Harras'd Attention linger'd and fell sick—
Yet he, with indefatigable speed,
To-morrow hies to Westminster ; well stuff'd
Each pocket with old tavern-bills unpaid,
Tape-tied, and roll'd up like a brief, which oft
He to the court displays.—But he has talk'd
Enough in Coffee House : here he must sit
Silent, and still, and sad, and unobserv'd—
Whilst oft, with ardent eye, and envious wish,
He views the ermine, that adorns and guards

The Judge's shoulder—or with civil leer
Invites the spruce Attorney to his seat.

Next them sat one, clad in close-button'd coat
Of never-fading drab ; with cautious hand
He oft secures his fob ; for he that morn
Receiv'd his dividend, and posted here
Joyful, to celebrate this annual feast.
Perhaps he had been an ironmonger, one
Who dealt in locks and bolts, to keep out thieves,
That richer rogues might slumber on their down ;
Or sold the very crow, which forc'd the tomb
To ope his marble jaws, and disengorge
The body of his wife he lately mourn'd,
Now pack'd in hamper snug for Surgeons' Hall.
Abrupt he quits his box ; but first with care
Arranges in two rows his scanty pence ;
Correct arithmetician ! whilst the lad

(He oft commanded with imperious brow
On many an errand) with despairing looks
In vain expects to be *remember'd* now.—

See yon gay troop, how suddenly they rise,
In joyful extasy laughing full loud:
With boisterous mirth they snatch their high-crown'd hats
From off the trembling pegs; for Bourdeaux' grape
Brews now a second ferment in their veins,
And sparkles in their eyes with liquid fire.
See from a lavish hand, and the quick jirk
Of generous carelessness, the cash rebounds
Upon the half-drown'd table; whilst the brisk
And active waiter sweeps away the mafs,
Splendid and heavy; nor the joke disdains
On his obsequious smiles, and ready bow..
Some to thea^ttic domes their steps direct,
To see fair heroines, urg'd by tragic woes,

Pump high their swelling bosoms ; or their eyes
 Wipe with the snowy kerchief not their own.
 To some, more genial to the present flow
 Of animal delight, lo broad-fac'd Mirth
 Leads in her parent Farce ;—or, with an air
 Half serious and half jesting, the gay Muse
 Of Comedy upholds her varying glas,
 And teaches the unburthen'd heart of youth
 To smile with FARREN, or to laugh with QUICK.

Lo, next sat one in sombre garb and old,
 And heedless of the mode ; as if the Master
 Of all the world calls happiness : on him
 Fortune ne'er deign'd to smile, but pass'd him by
 Like a proud damsel. Yet kind Nature gave
 To this sad youth, in pity to his lot,
 Such bright materials, pure and unalloy'd,
 Of intellectual ore, that Toil confess'd

Her hopes presumptuous, and her powers too weak
To emulate the splendor of that mine.
On him each Muse her choicest wreath bestow'd,
Enrich'd his mind with all the latent stores
Coy Science boasts, and hides in depths profound
Of earth and heaven. They taught this youth to love
Whatever Art, by Genius led, presents
To captivate the sences: his decree
Sanction'd at once their beauty and their use—
Palladio's columns, Raphael's traits sublime;
Or what in stone imperial Rome display'd;
Spoils of immortal Athens: her fair forms,
Of peerless symmetry and matchless grace,
Portray'd to his high-cultur'd soul a view
Of boundless prospect and unsated joy.
Nor would he, fullenly and cold of heart,
To Modern Italy refuse the praise
She justly claims, to fix th' enraptur'd ear:

By the resistless magic of sweet sounds.
Still must he tread the rugged paths of want.
Nurture and fair acquirements exalt
His vigorous mind above the lust of gold,
Yet not above the pangs of indigence ;
They teach him but to feel and weep the more,
Each wish obstructed, and each hope delay'd :
Teach him to scorn each baser means to rise,
And leave the world to blockheads and to knaves.
Silent he has retir'd, and seeks his room
Bespread with many a volume, which beguile
With gentle calm delight his sense of woe—
Unles by chance or habit he resumes
The tales, which Nature has with joy confess'd
Her most accomplished secretaries wrote,
Fielding and Richardson—with passion warm,
Sublime by genius, and by truth divine.
Alive to sympathy, his mind recalls

His absent Julia, whom in cold despair
 His fancy pictures leaning on the arm
 Of some more favour'd lover—not more fond—
 Whose wealth superior, or superior rank,
 Her parents, friends, perhaps herself admires !
 With grief like this he knows his heart must throb,
 Till the cold icy hand of friendly Death
 Has stopp'd the genial current of his blood,
 Which nought but ill-requited love could chill.

Not distant, sat a phalanx firm and close,
 Of antique air and dress precisely plain ;
 For full ten lustres have, with caution sage,
 And due experience, taught these recreant knights
 To center in themselves each wish, each joy.
 “Celibacy has mark'd them for her own.”
 The great coat hanging on the well-known peg ;
 The Indian kerchief, which erewhile had screen'd

From the rude Eastern wind the wearer's neck,
 Carefully folded, lies in pocket snug.
 Each hat the waiter with accustom'd care
 Has brush'd, and hung aloft ;—and now presents
 The bill of fare, and hears the dire critiques
 On each rejected article, unmov'd.—
 The busy circling glafs has now dispers'd
 Each nicer scruple, and each coy reserve :
 Full soon in phrase obscene and sneers oblique
 At love and matrimony they point the jest ;—
 Of squalling brats ; of wives who never cease
 To pour the copious stream of brawling words ;
 Of horns which unsuspecting husbands wear
 High on their foreheads, seen by all their friends,
 To them alone invisible ; they hold
 Unseemly converse ; and with boisterous mirth
 The trite and barren joke is heard again.
 The Muse disdains the secrets to reveal

Of these apparent Stoics, but in truth
 Rank Epicures ; nor blushing would recount
 How oft each grave companion has repair'd
 To the fam'd surgeon's close retired door :
 Nor is she willing to sum up the hours
 These sage ones pass in garrets dark and high.
 With well-dissembled looks, and false excuse,
 They one by one retire : no social warmth
 Of heart can prompt them to betray the place,
 Each amorous dotard seeks his lawless prey.

Close to the fire sat one, whose gorgeous wig,
 And waistcoat's ample folds emboss'd with gold,
 Proclaim'd him Fortune's Favourite ; whose phiz,
 Wrinkled and pale, confess'd his youthful days
 Were fled, but not his love of youthful sports.
 Oft with lack-lustre eye, and hollow tones
 By frequent cough impeded, he would tell

Of many a prank of spirit and renown.

Now, cloath'd with all that caution and expence

Can heap on his emaciate limbs, he creeps,

Tottering and slow, toward the genial hearth.

Long has he sat contemplative ; nor dream'd

Of home, the wife man's paradise—Ah, there

He finds no solace, there no lovely face

Of wife endearing, there no smiles of babes.

Alas, his fortune to repair, the prey

Of vice and shapeless luxury ; and to keep

His shatter'd relicks from the prison gate,

With the vain hopes of liberty, he wed,

Full many a winter since, in life's full bloom,

A rich, decrepid, proud, and vulgar dame—

Who makes his house, by jealousy and frowns,

Darker than the dark mansion he escap'd.

Apart, mysterious, in a nook retir'd
Sat a close junto, in whose dubious dres
Not time, but dissipation, seem'd t' have mix'd
Tatters with lace, and in their foward looks
Pert ignorance, and cowardly dismey,
Affected wisdom, and proud consequence,
Sat shrouded in a black and lurid cloud :
Their talk was vehement, and each blood-red eye
Askant and cautious, and their wanderings wild
Fix'd into silence by the general pause
Indignant hearers solemnly maintain'd.
Of diadems, of titles, and each badge
That Merit on the venerable brow
Of each accomplish'd citizen bestows ;
Who to the State aught worthy has atchiev'd,
By wisdom or by valour, are upheld,
By these rude bablers, as the marks of shame

Or empty bawbles, to provoke a smile ;
 Whilst to the splendid orb of kingly power,
 From whose bright beams honour and fair renown,
 In glorious emanations, beam around,
 Like Saturn they uplift their envious eyes,
 To tell him how they hate his fostering beams.
 Long has their conduct, vicious and profane,
 Injur'd their country's laws and sound behests.
 Hence flows their rancour from a conscious mind,
 " An injur'd friend must never be forgiven."

Near them a youth, impatient of this talk
 Disloyal and unmanly, fat and frown'd.
 Flush'd with rude health ; whose fresh cockade and coat,
 With red and yellow flaming in the van,
 Proclaim'd him a defender of the state.
 If youth and courage can this title claim,
 Fame shall rejoice in his aspiring mind,

And weave the early laurel round his head,
And foes approve the deed :—Lo, some few years
And service shall improve his air, and join
The soldier with the man :—See, with a front
Gallant and gay, he marches to the bar :
For there lives one in dress, nor less in mind,
Young and coquettish, whom the Captain's lace
Has won to smiles and converse. Much he talks
Of love, and war ; and languishingly mourns
His country's honour soon will call away
So fond a lover from so fair a maid.—
All this the girl believes ; nor heeds the words
Of her more prudent sister ; who has long
Reign'd mistress of the Coffee house, and known
These fighting sparks and their short memories.
The Captain soon will to the Indies go,
And think no more of Lucy—should she gain
Another lover quite as young and brisk,

She may like him forget, unless nine moons
Should prove the *reckoning*, she is forc'd to keep.

Half sad, half merry, from this motley scene
I late retir'd—for now the midnight hour,
Leading Oblivion, with her silent tread,
Had pointed to my couch—there in repose
To sooth my aching head, and throbbing heart.

F I N I S.